



“A lot of people have gone farther than they could because someone else thought they could.”
Anonymous

Mentor Doug Havens (Escondido Adventist Academy) demonstrating the use of new equipment purchased by mentee Melissa Price (Redlands Adventist Academy).

Mary Lopez* was excited about her first full-time teaching assignment in an Adventist elementary school. She had completed all the required coursework in the teacher-preparation program, passed the state-mandated tests for certification, and completed her student-teaching assignments with positive recommendations from her master teacher. Mary was considered a promising teacher in training by her college professors and potential employers, two of whom offered her teaching positions.

In the week before school began, Mary appeared enthusiastic and collegial with other faculty and administration. She cheerfully greeted the parents and students on registration day. Mary assured the principal that she was ready for the new school year. She had put up attractive bulletin boards and completed her long-range lesson plans, as well as a detailed lesson plan for the first two weeks of school. The textbooks and other materi-

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als were neatly stacked and ready for distribution to students on the first day of school. Mary had posted a “Welcome” sign on the door and rules on the wall of her classroom.

Once school began, all seemed to be going well for Mary.

The first stress point came a few days before Back to School Night, when teachers met with

* Not their real names.

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parents to explain classroom rules, the curriculum, homework policy, field trips, etc. However, since this topic had been covered in the teacher-training program, Mary was able to prepare for it with a little help from the other teachers. All was well, or so it seemed.

Several weeks later, the principal, Mr. Felt,* walked into Mary's classroom one morning to find the students working quietly by themselves. The students told him that Ms. Lopez was in the restroom. A few minutes later, Mary emerged. One glance, and the principal could see that she had been crying. When he asked if everything was all right, Mary quickly pulled herself together and said she would be OK. The principal suspected that everything was not OK and decided to meet with Mary after school.

That afternoon, when Mr. Felt asked Mary how things were going, she began to sob uncontrollably. After a few minutes, she confessed, "Things are not going very well! I have been crying every day, and I cannot sleep at night. I don't think I am doing a good job. My stomach goes into a knot every morning when I am getting ready for

school. I don't know what is the matter with me. I try to prepare for class, and I am doing my very best, but the kids are not listening to me. I feel overwhelmed, and the parents have so many questions. I don't think I can do this anymore."

The principal, sorry to have been oblivious to Mary's needs, offered to provide her with a teacher's aide or send her for counseling, to no avail. Mary had decided teaching was not for her and wanted to quit right then.

Mary's case may be somewhat extreme. However, while many new teachers manage to survive their introduction to teaching, research indicates that for a significant number of them,

While many new teachers manage to survive their introduction to teaching, research indicates that for a significant number of them, the first three to five years are very challenging.

the first three to five years are very challenging. In fact, the attrition rate for public school teachers after one year is 17 percent, 30 percent after the second year, and as high as 80 percent after 10 years.¹ Researchers at the University of North Carolina reported that the attrition rate for first-year teachers was 2.5 times higher than that of more experienced teachers.²

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future published in 1996 predicted that in 10 years, two million elementary and secondary teachers would be needed to replace teachers who would be retiring or leaving the profession and to meet

the demand for new teachers due to population growth trends over that decade. The first major premise of the report was that "What teachers know and do is the most important influence on what students learn."³ The report recommended that the states create and fund mentoring programs for beginning teachers. Today, 33 states have done so.

Many U.S. public school districts, including those with the highest growth rates, have implemented a mentor teacher program to help ensure the success of beginning teachers and to maintain stability within the school district. Nearly all teachers who have been paired with a mentor are unani-

mous in their praise of the program. These teachers, reflecting on their first years of teaching, indicate that the support, counsel, camaraderie, and encouragement they received from the mentor played a key role in their success and longevity in the profession. The positive impact of mentoring programs on teacher morale is also seen as an important reason to warrant their inclusion in a teacher-induction program.

Since there is no attrition data for teachers in the Adventist school system, one must look at statistics for private education in general. One such source is the "Schools and Staffing Survey" conducted during the 1987-1988 school year and the follow-up survey the following school year. It was found that the attrition rate for teachers in private schools was 12.7 percent, which was more than twice as high as teachers in the public school system (5.7 percent).⁴ It seems likely that the rate of attrition in the Adventist school system falls within this range as well.

The primary focus of this article is to provide a practical framework that conference offices of education and large schools can use to develop and implement mentor teacher programs to support the beginning teacher.

An Overview of the Mentor's Responsibilities

Teacher mentoring consists of experienced educators sharing their knowledge, expertise, and training with new teachers. It has clearly defined expectations of the mentor and the beginning teacher, referred to as the mentee or protégé. It is important for the mentor to enter this relationship with a commitment to help the beginning teacher succeed.

The mentor must:

- Work regularly and directly with the mentee according to an established schedule;
- Aid the mentee in long-range planning for the school year;
- Assist the mentee in creating a classroom environment that is conducive to learning and motivates students to manage themselves;

ORING

- Ensure adequate lesson planning and preparation for the first three weeks of school;
- Offer ideas to engage students in special projects;
- Be available to assist the mentee with problems as they arise;
- Provide feedback, guidance, and support to the mentee without appearing to meddle;
- Offer insight into research-based support for instructional strategies;
- Assist in the development of classroom materials;
- Help the mentee to better understand the culture and organization of the school;
- Have periodic contact with the mentee to review progress, debrief on successes and failures, and inform the mentee of professional-growth opportunities; and
- Model effective teaching strategies and professional conduct.

The Mentor Teacher Program planning committee of the Pacific Union Conference identified several key outcomes for its mentor teacher program. The mentor will:

M - *Model* the teaching competencies identified as essential for success in teaching;

E - *Encourage* the personal and emotional well-being of beginning teachers;

N - *Nurture* the professional growth and retention of beginning teachers;

T - *Transmit* the philosophy and culture of Adventist education to beginning teachers;

O - *Observe* classroom teaching and review effective practices with mentees;

R - *Reinforce* the development of self-improvement goals and problem-solving skills; and

S - *Support* and challenge beginning teachers with ongoing assistance.

The mentor does not supervise the mentee but rather maintains a supportive, cordial, and professional relationship. Evaluation for professional growth and continual employment is the responsibility of the employer. Conversations between the teacher and the mentor must remain confidential. The relationship might be impaired or

compromised if the mentor also served as the mentee's evaluator.

Building Effective Mentor-Mentee Relationships

Not every experienced teacher can be a good mentor because the mentor-mentee relationship is in some ways a forced partnership. The mentor and mentee often don't know each other and have usually been assigned to work together. It is therefore imperative that the administrator help the mentee to approach the relationship as being in his or her best interests rather than seeing it as a threat. Being assigned to a mentor does not indicate a lack of preparation or professional shortcomings. Rather, the mentor can provide specialized support to help the mentee succeed during those crucial first few years of teaching.

In the Pacific Union, we have found that when the mentor teachers are

identified by the conference office of education or the school and invited to participate in the program, they come with a commitment to help beginning teachers. Even so, the mentor must have the right attributes and qualities for this type of relationship. He or she must be committed to the role and willing to invest the necessary time and effort. For Adventist teachers, particularly multigrade teachers, who have a heavier-than-normal work load, taking on the task of mentoring a beginning teacher represents extra work without increased remuneration. Many Adventist educators, however, appreciate having the title of "mentor" and the opportunity to mentor a beginning teacher.

The mentor's warm and accepting attitude plays an important role in building the relationship. Likewise, the mentee's willingness to be guided and critiqued by another teacher will help ensure that the relationship gets off to a



Mentor Edith Bradshaw (right) and mentee Maylinne Peters, both teachers at La Sierra Elementary School, engage in long-range planning before the start of the school year.

good start.

Many studies and reports have identified classroom management as a key issue in the success of the beginning teacher. A poorly managed classroom makes it almost impossible for learning to take place. Too often, beginning teachers view themselves as failures because they enter the profession with weak classroom-management skills, not understanding that these skills are honed by experience. They do not understand why students do not want to sit quietly in the classroom or follow instructions. The perceptive mentor can offer suggestions and problem-solving solutions—but even more important, he or she can help the beginning teacher plan and organize for the first few weeks of school in order to prevent classroom-management problems during those critical first few days. The mentor can offer insight into what is likely to work, based on experience; and identify potential pitfalls without stifling the mentee's creativity.

The effective mentor is skilled in the art of teaching and providing instructional support in an environment that promotes student learning. It is helpful to have the mentee visit the mentor's classroom early in the school year for informal observations, to team-teach with the mentor, or to observe a model lesson. At the end of the day, the two can reflect together on what went well and what didn't go as planned. The mentee can ask questions and seek clarification. It is critical at this early stage in the relationship that the mentor demonstrates successful teaching and classroom management.

The mentor should also visit the mentee's classroom for similar purposes; however, teaching demonstrations in the mentee's classroom should occur by mutual agreement. The value of the team approach can be seen in the following statement made by a high school teacher who had taught for 25 years, "I have taught 20,000 classes; I have been 'evaluated' 30 times; but I have never seen another teacher teach."⁵

Another frustration for beginning teachers is dealing with "problem parents." Quite often, the problem results

from miscommunication or the teacher's failure to understand parental concerns. The mentor can help the mentee build positive interpersonal relationships that encourage parents to become partners in the education of their children. The mentor can also give concrete ideas on effective strategies to keep parents informed about their children's progress in school and school/classroom events. A parent handbook (in contrast to the bulletin published by the school) contains grade- or class-specific information of special interest and benefit to parents. Some of the topics covered in this handbook include a brief biographical sketch of the teacher, class schedule, parent sign-up forms for field trips and help with fund-raisers, homework policy, classroom discipline strategies, a list of classroom supplies, guidelines for birthday celebrations in the classroom, etc. Parents also seem to appreciate knowing the specific topics students will be studying as well as the skills that will be taught or reinforced during the school year.

The mentor should see himself or herself as a lifelong learner who frequently engages in professional growth activities and is therefore able to encourage the mentee's participation in staff-development opportunities.

The mentor must have the skill and the capacity to communicate hope and inspire optimism in the beginning teacher. The mentor is involved in building another teacher, and thus can make a contribution that will impact lives for years to come. In the mentor teacher program, one can see the truth of English author Albert Pine's statement that "*What we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others and the world remains and is immortal.*"⁶

Selecting the Mentor Teacher

Mentor teachers must be selected according to specific criteria, rather than merely by years of teaching experience. The local conference office of education or the school that plans to implement a mentor teacher program should have a set of minimum qualifications to use in compiling a list of po-

tential candidates. A mentor teacher should have:

- Earned a valid Standard or Professional denominational teaching credential;
- Achieved regular employment status;
- Provided direct classroom instruction to students for at least 10 years;
- Demonstrated effective classroom management and discipline strategies;
- Built positive working relationships with peers and parents;
- Demonstrated effective communication skills;
- Received satisfactory or better performance ratings on the past three teacher evaluations; and
- Have a positive attitude about another teacher observing him or her teach.

Preparing Mentors to Serve as Facilitators

First, the conference or school needs to make a commitment to establishing a mentor teacher program. Once mentors have been identified, a formal training process will help ensure that everyone understands the goals and expectations of the program. Mentors need to know the parameters of the program and the operational protocols of the school system. Teachers who spend their days primarily working with children may need to be reminded that adults tend to be more goal oriented, and that they learn best when their learning is relevant to their experience.⁷

There are numerous resources to help in developing a mentor program, including national and state departments of education. Mentor training programs typically cover the following topics:

- An overview of the "system" expectations of the mentor;
- An understanding of how adults learn;
- A review of effective teaching strategies;
- Characteristics of an effective classroom;
- A review of effective classroom-

management strategies;

- Preparing for parent-teacher conferences and other meetings/events; and
- Small-group problem-solving activities using typical problems beginning teachers are likely to encounter.

Conference Office of Education/ Site Administrator Responsibilities

The success of a mentoring program will depend to a large degree upon the planning, training, coordination, and support from the conference office of education and/or site administrators. Once mentors have gone through an orientation and have been assigned a mentee, plans must be set in place to:

1. Provide opportunity for a meeting of the mentors and mentees, ideally before the beginning of the school year or soon after. The following topics would be appropriate at this first meeting:

- a. mentor program expectations;
- b. mentor duties and responsibilities;
- c. pertinent topics covered at the mentor training/in-service that will be beneficial to the mentee;
- d. the importance of both mentors and mentees maintaining a simple log of contacts and topics discussed and

The Central California Conference in the Pacific Union has been operating a successful mentor teacher program for the past nine years. Readers desiring additional information on how the mentor teacher program operates may contact Ken Bullington or Ileana Santa-Cruz Espinosa, associate superintendents of education, Central California Conference, 2820 Willow Ave, Clovis, CA 93612. Phone (559) 347-3000. E-mail: KPBullington@aol.com.

For additional information, readers may also contact the author at the Pacific Union Conference, P.O. Box 5005, Westlake Village, CA 91359. Phone (805) 413-7100. E-mail: Thambi@puonline.org.



Dorothea Amey, former Pacific Union Conference associate director of education, at a mentor training in-service.



Mentor teachers engage in a group activity during the in-service.

assistance given/received during the school year, with the promise of confidentiality;

e. Methods of contact or accessibility during the school year (e-mail, telephone, etc.); and

f. Scheduled visits to their respective schools to observe each other's classrooms.

2. Provide opportunity for a mentor-mentee meeting prior to start of school or shortly thereafter. Mentor and mentee should agree on:

a. Methods of contact or accessibility during the school year (e-mail, telephone, etc.); and

b. Scheduled visits to their respective schools.

3. Provide opportunity for the mentee to visit and observe the men-

tor's classroom, followed by a post-observation conference at a convenient time the same day.

4. Arrange for the mentor to visit and observe the mentee's classroom, followed by a post-observation conference at a convenient time that same day.

5. Encourage regular communication between mentor and mentee throughout the school year.

6. Require mentors and mentees to submit quarterly reports of their interactions and visits.

7. Provide opportunity at the end of the school year for mentor and mentee to evaluate the effectiveness of their interactions and of the mentor program in general.

8. Provide/arrange for reimburse-

Sample Forms
(As used in the Pacific Union Conference Mentor Teacher Program)



Mentor/Mentee "Get Acquainted" Questionnaire
(To be completed before the first meeting or at the first meeting of mentor and mentee)

Name _____ ☐ Mentor ☐ Mentee

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

Phone # _____ Cell Phone # _____ e-mail _____

Hobby _____ Spouse's Name _____ Children _____

Favorite Foods _____

Hobbies _____

In my free time I like to: _____

Types of books I like to read: _____


I wish I knew more about: _____

My professional goals for this school year are:

- _____
- _____
- _____

My personal long-range goals are:

- _____
- _____
- _____



Mentor - Mentee Classroom Visit Observation Form
(To be completed by the observer and/or on "taking point" during the post-observation conference)

Check to indicate the one observing: _____ ☐ Mentor ☐ Mentee

Mentor: _____

Mentee: _____

School Site: _____ Date of Visit: _____

Grade Level: _____ Number of Students: _____

Subject/Lesson Taught: _____

Objective Goal for Lesson: _____

Teaching Methods/Strategies: _____

Materials Used: _____

Activity/Assignment Observed: _____

Comments: _____

Hampton.html (2001), pp. 2, 5.

3. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future" (September 1997), at <http://www.nctaf.org>, p. 10, retrieved September 14, 2006.

4. Croasmun, et al.

5. Linda Darling-Hammond, "Teacher Learning That Supports Student Learning" at <http://edutopia.org> (May 1, 1999), retrieved September 14, 2006.

6. See http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Albert_Pine/, retrieved September 14, 2006.

7. Northwest Regional Educational Library, National Mentoring Center, <http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/>.

8. Ellen G. White, *Educa-*

tion (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ.

Assn., 1903), p. 84.

9. See especially the article by Linda Gilbert, "What Helps Beginning Teachers?" *Educational Leadership* 62:8 (May 2005), pp. 36-39.

To obtain copies of these and other helpful forms to use in a mentoring program, contact the author (Thambi@puonline.org).

ment of travel expenses incurred by the mentor and mentee. In order to not pose an added burden to the mentor/mentee schools, the conference office of education should bear the expenses for substitute teachers when the mentor/mentee visits the other's school.

9. Offer to reimburse the mentor/mentee for incidental expenses, such as a "get acquainted" meal at the start of the school year, a mentee gift, telephone calls, etc.

10. Offer the mentor and mentee a predetermined number of professional activity credits for participating in the mentor program, subject to the completion and submission of all required reports.

Ellen White, commenting on Christ's work of mentoring His disciples, wrote, "The most complete illustration of Christ's methods as a teacher is found in His training of the first twelve disciples . . . To them, above all others, He gave the advantage of His own companionship. Through personal association He impressed Himself upon

these chosen collaborators."⁸ Mentors give of themselves to help ensure the growth and success of another—a

priceless gift.

A recent issue of *Educational Leadership* (May 2005)⁹ focused on the generational gap that is evident in the teaching work force and of the growing need to support new teachers. At a time when the Adventist educational system is having difficulty finding qualified teachers to fill current needs, we must do all we can to support, encourage, and retain our beginning teachers so that they experience success and the joys of teaching right at the outset, and can be more effective in preparing students for today and for eternity. ✍



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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Jean Boreen, Mary Johnson, Donna Niday, and Joe Potts, *Mentoring Beginning Teachers: Guiding, Reflecting, Coaching* (York, Maine: Stenhouse Publ., 2000), p. 6.

2. Janice Croasmun, Donald Hampton, and Suzannah Herrmann, *Issues Challenging Education, "Teacher Attrition: Is Time Running Out?"* at <http://horizon.unc.edu/projects/issues/papers/>

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